

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-07 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 L-03

TRSE-00 /030 W

-----043048 221545Z /40

R 221350Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8988

INFO USDOC WASHDC

USDOT WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELTN, UR, ECON

SUBJECT: OVERVIEW ON PROSPECTS FOR SOVIET RAILROADS

REFS: (A) MOSCOW 2571, (B) MOSCOW 1679

SUMMARY: SOVIET RAILROAD OFFICIALS TELL US THEY SEE THEIR MAIN TASK TO INCREASE THE THROUGHPUT CAPACITY OF EXISTING LINES BY INCREASING THE SPEED AND WEIGHT OF TRAINS. ELECTRIFICATION OF LINES WILL BE EMPHASIZED WELDED TRACKS. BELOW PLAN 1976 RAILROAD PERFORMANCE WAS BLAMED MAINLY ON THE DIFFICULT WINTER. OTHER DIFFICULTIES WERE ACKNOWLEDGED BUT WERE SAID TO BE IN PROCESS OF RESOLUTION. RAILROAD CONTAINER HANDLING FACILITIES WERE DESCRIBED BY THESE OFFICIALS AS BEING MORE EXTENSIVE THAN RECENTLY REPORTED IN THE SOVIET PRESS. END SUMMARY.

1. E/C COUNSELOR, ACCOMPANIED BY EMBOFF, CALLED MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS JUNE 17 TO DISCUSS OVERALL PROSPECTS FOR SOVIET RAILROADS. OUR HOST WAS FINITSKIY (FNU), DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE MINISTRY'S SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COUNCIL. AT OUTSET FINITSKIY GAVE A LONG, PREPARED EXPOSITION  
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STRESSING THAT RAILROAD TASKS WILL CONTINUE TO BE SHAPED BY PARTICULARLY HEAVY TRAFFIC DENSITY OF SOVIET SYSTEM.

2. FINITSKIY SAID THE NEW RAILWAY MINISTER, PAVLOVSKIY, HAS ORDAINED INCREASE IN VOLUME OF RAILROAD FREIGHT BY IMPROVED ORGANIZATIONAL MEANS, AS WELL AS BY INTRODUCTION OF NEW EQUIPMENT. THE MAIN OBJECTIVE IS TO INCREASE THROUGHPUT

CAPACITY OF EXISTING LINES BY INCREASING THE SPEED AND WEIGHT OF TRAINS. BY 1980, SPEED FOR FREIGHT TRAINS WILL BE INCREASED FROM 90 TO 100 KILOMETERS PER HOUR AND SOME PASSENGER LINES, E.G., MOSCOW-LENINGRAD, WILL GO AS HIGH AS 200 KILOMETERS PER HOUR. REGARDING WEIGHT, THE INTENT IS TO INCREASE THE LOAD PER METER OF TRACK BY USING NEW FREIGHT CARS. THE SOVIETS HAVE STUDIED THE US EXPERIENCE IN INCREASING THE LOAD PER AXLE BUT, IN VIEW OF THE PRESENT VERY HIGH USSR TRAFFIC DENSITY, THEY HAVE DECIDED AGAINST THIS OPTION. RAISING AXLE LOADS WOULD HAVE ENTAILED LARGER TRAINS AND RECONSTRUCTION OF STATION TRACKS. DEVELOPMENT AND INTRODUCTION OF MULTI-AXLE CARS IS ALSO SEEN AS A SOLUTION. FINITSKIY SAID THAT COOPERATION WITH US SPECIALISTS UNDER THE TRANSPORTATION AGREEMENT ON THESE QUESTIONS WAS "VERY USEFUL."

3. FINITSKY THEN GAVE A RUNDOWN ON ANTICIPATED EQUIPMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES (PAPERS BEING POUNDED TO EUR/SOV). IN SUMMARY THERE ARE THAT:

- MORE POWERFUL ELECTRIC AND DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES WILL BE BUILT,
- FUTURE RELIANCE WILL BE MORE ON ELECTRICAL THAN DIESEL TRACTION,
- MULTI-AXLE CARS WILL BE DEVELOPED; OUTER DIMENSIONS OF FREIGHT CARS WILL BE REVISED TO INCREASE LIFTING CAPACITY,
- NUMBER OF SPECIALIZED FREIGHT CARS WILL INCREASE, THOUGH PROPORTION OF GONDOLA CARS WILL REMAIN DOMINANT,

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- ROLLER BEARINGS AND METAL CARS WILL BE USED ON A "MASS SCALE,"
- HEAVIER RAILS (75 KG PER METER) AS WELL AS THERMALLY HARDENED RAILS WILL INCREASINGLY BE USED,
- CONTINUOUS WELDED TRACKS WILL BE USED,
- CONCRETE TIES WILL BE USED TO SAVE TIMBER BUT RESEARCH MUST STILL BE DONE TO REDUCE TRACK RIGIDITY,
- BROAD-SCALE INTRODUCTION OF AUTOMATED CONTROL SYSTEMS.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-07 L-03 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

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4. COUNSELOR REQUESTED COMMENT ON RECENT PRESS CRITICISMS OF THE RAILROAD'S PERFORMANCE, INCLUDING THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE - COUNCIL OF MINISTERS DECREE IN FEBRUARY, 1977, REFTEL A. FINITSKIY RESPONDED THAT THESE CRITICISMS WERE "QUITE RIGHT." 1976 WAS A "ROUGH YEAR" DUE TO THE SEVERE WINTER. THE RAILROADS FELL WELL BELOW PLAN IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE YEAR AND WERE UNABLE TO RECOUP, THOUGH THEY CAME CLOSE, BY THE END OF THE YEAR. THERE WERE, HOWEVER, OTHER SHORTCOMINGS AS DESCRIBED IN THE DECREE. SINCE THEN DECISIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE SUPPLY OF EQUIPMENT, TO REDUCE THE PRACTICE OF SOME CUSTOMERS OF USING RAIL CARS FOR STORAGE, AND TO IMPROVE THE ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE RAILROADS. AS EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENT, HE NOTED THE 5 MONTH RAILROAD PLAN FOR 1977 HAS BEEN FULFILLED.

5. COUNSELOR INVITED THE MINISTRY TO CONTACT US IF THEY WANTED TO GET COMMERCIAL INFORMATION FROM US FIRMS ON APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT. FINITSKIY SAID THE PROPOSAL WILL BE TRANSMITTED TO THE APPROPRIATE OFFICIALS.

6. DISCUSSING CONTAINERS, ZVERKOV, DEPUTY CHIEF, CONTAINER BRANCH, ALL UNION RAILWAY TRANSPORT RESEARCH INSTITUTE, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SAID 55 MILLION TONS OF CONTAINER CARGO IS HANDLED IN THE USSR ANNUALLY, 35 MILLION TONS ON THE RAILROADS. CONTAINERS WITH 5 TON CAPACITY ARE HANDLED AT 1400 SITES. 58 OF THESE SITES, INCLUDING MAJOR INDUSTRIA CITIES, FAR EAST AND BORDER STATIONS CAN HANDLE 20 AND 40 FOOT INTERNATIONAL STANDARD CONTAINERS. (FYI - BODNYI TRANSPORT REPORTED LAST OCTOBER 9 THAT THROUGHOUT THE USSR ONLY 29 RAILROAD STATIONS ARE EQUIPPED TO HANDLE 20 FOOT CONTAINERS AND NONE CAN HANDLE 40 FOOT CONTAINERS, REFTEL B. END FYI).

7. IN RESPONSE TO EMBOFF'S QUESTION ON REPORTED RAIL CONGESTION AT THE IRANIAN-SOVIET FRONTIER, ZVERKOV MENTIONED

THIS MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED AS A "RANDOM CASE." MEASURES ARE NOW BEING TAKEN TO MAKE THE SIBERIAN "LAND-BRIDGE" MORE EFFECTIVE, INCLUDING USE OF ATOMATED TRACER SYSTEMS FOR THE CONTAINERS.

8. ZVERKOV REFERRED OUR QUESTION ON BAM CONSTRUCTION TO MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT CONSTRUCTION, BUT ANOTHER OFFICIAL PRESENT, MR. LUKHOV, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SECTION, SAID HE HAD THE IMPRESSION CONSTRUCTION WAS ON SCHEDULE AND THAT THE WESTERN PORTION WAS EVEN AHEAD.

9. COMMENT: WHEN WE FINALLY GOT DOWN TO SPECIFICS, THE SOVIET OFFICIALS WERE WILLING TO ACKNOWLEDGE SOME OF THEIR DIFFICULTIES. THEY SOUGHT TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE SITUATION WAS NOW IN HAND AS EVIDENCED BY THE 1977 PERFORMANCE. PERHAPS STUNG BY REFERENCE TO CRITICISM, THEY POINTED OUT DIFFICULTIES IN THE US RAIL SYSTEM AND COMMENTED THAT WE COULD PERHAPS LEARN FROM SOVIET EXPERIENCE. THE TONE OF THE CONVERSATION WAS POSITIVE, HOWEVER, AND WE HOPE FOR PERIODIC FOLLOW-UP MEETINGS TO MONITOR PERFORMANCE IN THIS KEY SECTOR

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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009